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U.S./ANTI-
TERRORISM

HARTMAN: This week President Reagan announced what he's calling a new offensive against terrorism, and he'll be asking Congress for the money to beef up intelligence, also to improve cooperation with our allies in dealing with terrorists. He also wants to give government agents the right to stage certain preventative raids and even some reprisals against suspected terrorists. Claire Sterling is an expert on terrorism. She's written books on the subject and joins me this morning from Rome. Claire Sterling, welcome back. STERLING: Thank you. Good morning.

HARTMAN: You're quoted as saying that this is long overdue, this action by the president of the United States or these comments. Why so? Explain that, would you?
STERLING: Well, I'm not sure about the reprisals, because I don't know the nature of those proposals and I would like to know more about those, but as an overall attempt, first of all to beef up pre-emptive intelligence so that we can find out before a terrorist attack instead of after, and secondly and equally important, to strengthen the pooling of information with other intelligence services. That's absolutely vital and it should have been done, in my opinion, years and years ago. I'm very glad to see that it's being done now and surely it's being done because precise knowledge in the hands of the authorities in Washington as there is in the hands of the authorities in Western European countries, that we are in now for a summer offensive, a terrorist offensive all over Europe and with the United States as the main target. So certainly we need to have a toughened, stiffened intelligence service operating and police service operating so that we can face it.

HARTMAN: Our State Department has said that since 1968 that over half of the terrorist attacks have been directed against Americans and yet most of these have happened overseas. How do you account for that?
STERLING: Well, first of all, it's much easier to attack American installations overseas than it is at home. The FBI is a very competent police force and we don't have in the United States the sort of hinterland for terrorists that they need to operate with some degree of safety. That is, there is not a political climate in America, generally speaking, that would support a terrorist operation of any scale. People would go to the police if they saw something suspicious happening, whereas the kind of terrorism we've seen flourishing in Europe and the Middle East has gotten by because there's always been a layer of

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the population surrounding the terrorist groups that's willing to give them some kind of protection and also, of course, no foreign country is in a position to protect every foreign embassy, every foreign businessman, every foreign diplomat. Therefore, necessarily, when American people go abroad, diplomats, businessmen, military and so on, there just can't be the sort of protection for every one of them that they would need to keep alive. So obviously there are thousands and thousands of targets floating loose around the world and very easy to hit at.

HARTMAN: How concerned should we be here about terrorist acts at the Olympics in Los Angeles this summer?

STERLING: Well, as I say, I have very, I have good reason to believe that from my own observations in Europe that there is a prepared organized terrorist offensive projected for this summer with the United States as the main target. Now whether or not that means there will be an attack at the Olympic games, of course nobody knows. Terrorists go after theater. Their purpose is to use any episode or event which is being watched by hundreds of millions of people on satellite television, and therefore, obviously, Olympic games make a spectacular target, but it doesn't have to be the only one. There is also a Democratic and Republican convention. There's a World's Fair in New Orleans. Any episode that can take advantage of the attention being turned toward the United States in that period can be successful from the terrorist point of view, and I think, I mean I know from what the preparations of governments in Europe tell me, I know that such an offensive is under way. We have just had a warning in Italy from 34 magistrates who have been handling terrorist interrogations and trials here for the last five or six years. They have very sternly reminded the Italian government not to let its guard down, although we seem here to feel that terrorism is over in Italy because, say these magistrates, they have very strong evidence that there is a restructuring going on inside Italy of the Red Brigade in collaboration with, in complicity with other groups all around Europe, and this means since progressively in the last year or two we have seen more and more the United States emerging as the primary target, that the focus of this is going to be on us.

HARTMAN: Claire Sterling, thank you very much for joining us from Rome this morning. STERLING: Thank you.